

University of Montana ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

2018

Wonder Woman: A Case Study for Critical Media Literacy

Adriana N. Fehrs

University of Montana, Missoula

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>



Part of the [Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons](#), [Mass Communication Commons](#), [Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), [Social Influence and Political Communication Commons](#), [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fehrs, Adriana N., "Wonder Woman: A Case Study for Critical Media Literacy" (2018). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 11271.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/11271>

This Professional Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

Wonder Woman: A Case Study for Critical Media Literacy

By Adriana Fehrs

University of Montana

Introduction

At a surface level, *Wonder Woman* may appear to fulfill many of the wants and wishes of modern day Americans – more female involvement behind the scenes, a strong leading female role, and a compelling plot. To many, it seems as though the film is a truly break-through feminist film. Considering the success and popularity of this film it warrants a further examination. We must ask ourselves, what are the consequences of such wide acceptance and promotion of this film? The media has vast influence on the American audience, promoting certain ideals and qualifying what is socially acceptable, and research has shown that juveniles and children are especially susceptible to the impact of the messages they receive from the media (Kyra, Grumbein & Cahill, 2017).

To delve deeper into the messages *Wonder Woman* is sending to its audience, a Critical Media Literacy (CML), ideological, and feminist framework will be used to examine whether, and if so how, *Wonder Woman* succumbs to stereotypes that are often portrayed in the media and whether, and if so, it challenges stereotypes. These theories will be used in the ensuing project to build a curriculum aimed at high school students.

Wonder Woman (2017) has many individuals touting its success as a feminist film. It is the first of the DC comics films starring a female protagonist, whilst previous superhero movies have barely included women outside of the realm of serving as a love interest for the leading male protagonist (Kvaran, 2017). DC Comics and Warner Bros stated that Israeli actress Gal Gadot, who stars as *Wonder Woman*, is the first female-led superhero film since 2005, when Jennifer Garner played the lead role in Rob Bowman's *Elektra* (Hawksley, 2014). For DC fans

PRO PAPER

and movie critics alike, this film is viewed as an all-around success. Furthermore, critics have reached a consensus about *Wonder Woman*, stating that it is revolutionary in many aspects – challenging gender norms, exemplary cinematography and computer-generated imagery (CGI) from a female director, as well as leading gross profits for a comic book turned film (McClintock, 2017). *Wonder Woman* is the most successful superhero origin movie of all time and one of the most critically acclaimed films of the genre (Hughes, 2017). *Forbes Magazine* estimated *Wonder Woman*'s box office totals reached \$821.74 million, surpassing 2002's *Spider-Man* and making Gal Godot's Amazon warrior-princess the winner of the highest-grossing superhero origin film of all time. Along with its success in the box office, the film was nominated for several awards: 2018 Sag Awards and the Awards Leaderboard for the top films of 2017. *Forbes* also states that Warner gave the *Wonder Woman* film a heavy Oscar push, including for Best Picture and Best Director. In total, *Wonder Woman* took home eight different awards including the 2018's Critic's Choice Movie Award for Best Action Movie (The Broadcast Film Critics Association, 2018). In addition to its critic's accolades the media has inundated viewers with positive reviews for the film; the *Washington Post* states,

An indifferent box office promises to get a lift from a genuinely novel protagonist as enigmatic as she is compelling. And women — long expected to internalize myths of exaggerated male potency as their own — finally have a symbolic universe that feels, if not entirely corrective, at least imaginatively in keeping with their own hopes, dreams and realities (Hornaday, 2017).

Audience members have also expressed their satisfaction with the film. On Rotten Tomatoes *Wonder Woman* received an 88 percent audience rating. It is evident that *Wonder Woman* has

PRO PAPER

wooed the masses – or better yet stated, has quelled those asking for more female superheroes or a strong female protagonist lead.

The iconic *Wonder Woman* figure is an ideal case study to use in a curriculum which teaches high school aged children about CML. CML is the process of training individuals, so they may access and understand the content and symbolic forms through which knowledge and culture are transmitted, as well as having a command of the tools and codes that enable them to express themselves and communicate socially. (Area 2008: 9). Specifically, the curriculum will examine race, class, ethnicity, and gender portrayals in *Wonder Woman*, beginning with a brief review of the comic series and focusing on the 2017 film.

The curriculum will position students to examine the hegemonic ideologies that are represented in pop culture, specifically *Wonder Woman*. The portrayal of women in media, especially super hero movies, often only portrays fragile, vulnerable, submissive and exploitative characteristics (Miller, Rauch & Kaplan, 2016). Therefore, it is important to see how *Wonder Woman* portrays American ideals. What kinds of stereotyping occurs, and where does *Wonder Woman* challenge and/or reinforce the American hegemonic ideology?

An ideological criticism of *Wonder Woman* examines the underlying values and ideals that are highlighted and represented in the comics and film. In the modern world of technology and media, the significance of media as an information dissemination tool is magnified and has the potential to serve the interest of a specific group or class of people and shape ideology according to hegemonic control. Whereas, those with control determine what we view in media, has the potential to shape what society accepts as ‘truths’ and norms. In an overall power game, the media has a strategic place and forms social relations (Aqsa, 2015). Arguably, celebrities and celebrity figures are, in a sense, commodified. They become items that the public consumes,

PRO PAPER

maybe even on a daily basis, and products with the celebrity's depiction slapped onto them, or endorsed by them, are sought after. This commodification of *Wonder Woman* has been a long road, beginning in 1941. Thus, the longevity of this icon provides for ample material to examine CML and to understand how the comic series and media has shifted in their portrayals of race, class, ethnicity, and gender, over the years. In addition, the 2017 *Wonder Woman* film, because of its wide adoption and popularity in the American media, serves as a counterparty reflection of ideology in current American media. As part of my ideological critique, I will focus specifically on feminist rhetorical criticism. Feminist rhetorical critics examine media discourses to "critique sex roles, the patriarchal family, and the false consciousness created by the mythology of romance and heterosexuality" (Dow, 1996, p. 28). I am specifically interested in how depictions of women in *Wonder Woman* potentially reinforce hegemonic gender roles.

Overall, a CML curriculum that is aimed at high school students can be used as a tool to aid its participants in critically thinking about how *Wonder Woman* portrays race, class, ethnicity and gender. What kinds of stereotyping occur, and how and where does *Wonder Woman* challenge societal norms? The goal of the curriculum will be to add insight into each era of the comic book series and the film. I will provide the students with the history of *Wonder Woman* including the social and historical context of the comic series and film. Through the curriculum, I will offer readings of select comic strips and portions of the film as models for students to emulate; I will then provide exercises aimed at other elements of the comic strips and the film for students to complete, offering guidance and tools for the students to be able to draw their own broader cultural implications of these representations with respect to media. Through this process, students will be prompted to become active participants, rather than passive recipients of the dominant American discourse they are consuming from the media. CML will allow the

PRO PAPER

students to challenge what they see in the media, and to have a greater grasp of how these portrayals hurt or help society.

Artifact

The iconic *Wonder Woman* figure debuted in All Star Comics #8 in October 1941. The super heroine was created by William Moulton Marston, an American psychologist and writer, who wrote under the name of Charles Moulton, with Harry G. Peter as the artist for the original series. Marston was a psychological researcher and an enthusiastic bondage fetishist; he believed comic books were a great form for educational, anti-patriarchy propaganda (Lepore, 2015). Western society has grappled with the *Wonder Woman*'s bondage and discipline (B&D), dominance and submission (D&S), and sadism & masochism (S&M) (BDSM) roots. In almost every issue, the protagonist Diana is chained or tied up. This reoccurring theme provoked debate from the comic series' beginning. Opponents of comic books thought it was teeming with sexual fetishism. Beyond that, the author used bondage as an obvious metaphor for the many ways in which women were collectively and individually constrained by law and civil life – i.e. bound by marriage, domestic home duties, and children (Pollitt, 2014). Marston was a feminist and a well-known supporter of the women's suffrage movement. Suffrage was a social movement for the right of women to vote and run for office; it was a part of the overall women's rights movement. This is where Marston drew inspiration for his bondage imagery (Lepore, 2015).

Since its inception, *Wonder Woman* has appeared in an astounding 6,227 comics. The series remains in print today, spanning almost 77 years. In addition to the comics, *Wonder Woman* was

PRO PAPER

both a 1974 television film and a 1975-1979 television series based on the DC Comics. The 1974 television film *Wonder Woman* was directed by Vincent McEveety and starred Cathy Lee Crosby. It was a pilot for an anticipated television series by ABC. Instead, Warner Bros. and ABC developed the 1975 television series, *Wonder Woman*, starring Lynda Carter. The television series lasted three seasons and totaled 59 episodes from November 1975 to September 1979 (Westfahl, 2005).

This project will focus on several different artifacts from the *Wonder Woman* realm: The comic book series, 1941- today, and the 2017 *Wonder Woman* film. Specifically, I will use several comic panels that are representative of each comic book era, as well as several comic book covers from each era. Movie posters from the 2017 *Wonder Woman* film itself will be compared to the comic book covers of each era.

The comic book series gives greater context and background to the 2017 *Wonder Woman* film, and also spans the longest length of time which provides insight into the shifts and changes of the series that may also reflect social changes; the 2017 *Wonder Woman* film is a contemporary counterpart to the comic book series, which serves as an appropriate reflection of modern media practices and norms.

Wonder Woman Comic Book Series

Comics are categorized into four distinct ‘ages’: The Golden Age, Silver Age, Bronze Age, and Modern Age. *Wonder Woman* was around during each of these periods.

Golden Age

The Golden Age of comic books roughly spans from the 1930s to about 1950. This term refers to the rapid growth of comics books during this era. During this time comic books

PRO PAPER

became popular and some of the most well-known comic book superheroes emerged, such as Superman, Batman, Captain America and Wonder Woman. Many of the comic books centered on WWII. The Superheroes of this era wear patriotic costumes and are often seen fighting Nazis and ‘villains’ from other Nazi sympathizing countries (Wonder Woman, 1942).

Silver Age

The Silver Age of comic books refers to the time period from 1956 to 1975. During these years comics were blamed for a rise in juvenile crime statistics. When juvenile offenders admitted to reading comics, it was seized on as a common denominator. Author Fredric Wertham (1954), shifted the blame for juvenile delinquency from the parents of the children to the comic books they read. To address these concerns, in 1954 the Comics Code Authority was created to regulate the violence in comics. Wertham(1954) stated that *Wonder Woman* depicted bondage and that *Wonder Woman's* strength and independence made her a lesbian thus, many of the comic books during this era had to shift their story lines to meet regulations. Wonder Woman’s plot line became more complex and dynamic – focus shifted towards greater development of her origin story, she creates her alias Diana Prince, and engages in espionage.

Bronze Age

The Bronze Age spans from approximately 1970 to 1985. During this time, a general trend in comic books showed a shift in their focus to current social issues such as poverty, drug abuse, and pollution. During this time Wonder Woman rejoins the Justice League - also known as the ‘Big Seven’ - the DC super hero group consisting of Superman, Batman,

PRO PAPER

Wonder Woman, the Green Lantern, the Flash, Aquaman, and Cyborg. DC Comics writer Gardner Fox originally debuted the Justice League in 1960 in the comic book *Brave and the Bold* #28 (Kilkenny, 2015).

For a portion of comic books from this era Diana's story line is reset in WWII, and her appearance is revamped. In the 1980s George Perez, the artist for the comic book series, gave Wonder Woman a more muscular look and changed her outfit.

Modern Age

The period from 1985 to today is considered the Modern Age of comic books. This era is also known as the Dark Age of Comic Books: The CCA loosened its restrictions on comic book regulation and policies which resulted in many of the superheroes plot lines becoming significantly more cynical; during this period there can also be found the emergence of the anti-hero (Ayres, 2016).

During this time Wonder Woman's origin story is revamped again. She is said to have been sculpted from clay by her mother Queen Hippolyta and brought to life by Zeus. The storyline from this era serves as the basis for much of the 2017 *Wonder Woman* film.

Wonder Woman Film

Patty Jenkins was the first female to direct a film with a budget of over 100 million (Dockterman, 2016). At the time Jenkins accepted her directing role, Marvel and D.C. were competing in the box office. Marvel had been steadily producing superhero box office hits, and D.C. was aiming to out produce them. This caused the franchise to diversify to attract a greater audience. D.C. called for a female lead and chose *Wonder Woman* to lead the way (Dockterman, 2016).

PRO PAPER

Wonder Woman is the fourth installment in the DC Extended Universe (DCEU). Gal Gadot initially made her debut as Diana in the *Batman vs Superman* film (2016). A second *Wonder Woman* film is set to release in November 2019. (McClintock, 2017).

Plot Overview

The *Wonder Woman* film centers on the Diana Prince, A.K.A Wonder Woman. As a child, Diana grew up on the mythical island of Themyscira alongside the Amazons, an all-female warrior clan. Her desire to become a great warrior is evident from early on. Diana wants to be a fighter like the rest of the Amazons but her mother, Queen Hippolyta, forbids Diana from training. Her mother tells her how she asked Zeus for a child. He answers her prayers and the god sculpted Diana from clay. Unbeknownst to her, Zeus created Diana as a weapon to defend humankind from Ares, who had fallen from grace and sought to destroy mankind with war. Soon after, Diana's aunt Antiope convinces Hippolyta to let her train Diana, wanting her to be ready to face Ares, because everyone knows he's out there. The film then cuts to Diana as an adult. She is a well-trained warrior and is portrayed as the best fighter on the island. As she looks out into the vast ocean surrounding her mystic island, unexpectedly, a plane crash lands off the coast of the island. Diana saves the pilot from drowning in the wreckage and comes to find out that he is Captain Steve Trevor, a British intelligence officer. Steve explains to the Amazons about World War I and how he has learned of a sinister plan by Germany's General Erich Ludendorff and his chief chemist Dr. Isabel Maru, AKA Dr. Poison. Diana cannot convince her mother to let her leave the island to fight General Ludendorff, who she believes is Ares, in the war, because once she leaves the island she can never return. Instead, she sneaks out to leave with Captain Steve Trevor

PRO PAPER

and is caught. Eventually, her mother acquiesces to Diana's wishes. Diana leaves with the Captain on a boat and finds herself in London. From there, Captain Steve Trevor acquires a group of men to accompany Diana to the front lines of the war. The team makes it to the front-line trenches. Diana, against the wishes of Captain Steve Trevor, leaps out to fight off their German opponents, leading the forces to a victory. After their win, they learn that General Ludendorff will be attending a ball nearby. They infiltrate the gala in order to assassinate General Ludendorff, but their plan fails. The General escapes and Diana follows him to a German air base. There she kills Ludendorff but finds out that he is not Ares; it is elderly Sir Patrick, their British politician friend, who is Ares. Diana tries to kill Ares with the sword, only for him to destroy it. He tells Diana that it is she who is the real weapon forged by Zeus. A climatic fight scene ensues while Captain Steve Trevor sacrifices himself and Diana triumphs over Ares. Thus, Diana concludes that love triumphs over evil.

Literature Review

Critical Media Literacy

Most media literacy education focuses on students and occurs in classrooms. The National Association for Media Literacy Education defines media literacy as "the ability to ACCESS, ANALYZE, EVALUATE, CREATE, and ACT using all forms of communication;" additionally, it "empowers people to be critical thinkers and makers, effective communicators, and active citizens," (Media Literacy Defined, 2017). Overall, media literacy education is a tool to create an understanding of how media works and how audiences can be

PRO PAPER

active in their media choices and habits. According to Bandura (2001), media outlets such as television and other visual advertisements are especially influential modeling agents because of their enormous popularity and their powerful effects. Therefore, a popular comic series and film like *Wonder Woman* would arguably have a large influence on its audience.

There are different focal points of CML, like cultural studies or News Literacy, which teaches individuals how to apply media literacy skills to the interpretation of news. This project will not choose a specific focal point, but instead will teach CML as a general approach to dissecting media and then apply those skills to *Wonder Woman*. This project will use a type of CML which focuses on ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of the different dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Specifically, an individual can teach how media culture provides significant statements or insights about the social world, empowering visions of gender, race, and class. From there, one can explore how media can provide significant contributions to education. Adversely, it is important to indicate also how media culture can advance sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, and other forms of prejudice.

Furthermore, CML can be tailored to specific age groups. When aimed towards high school aged children, CML allows young students ‘to read information critically in multiple formats, to create alternative representations that question hierarchies of power, social norms and injustices, and to become agents of change’ (Funk et al. 2016). CML is used for interpreting media messages as well as for promoting exposure to diverse views and encouraging civic and political participation (Craft, Maksl, & Ashley, 2013; Kahne, Lee, & Feezell, 2012; Mihailidis, 2012).

PRO PAPER

In addition to understanding CML, there is existing research on how to approach and teach CML in a classroom. UNESCO gives a general five-point outline to presenting and teaching an understanding of CML.

The CML approach

UNESCO's (2016) five goals of CML, based on the principle of freedom of expression and information, include critical civic engagement as an integral component in guiding students. These principles are:

1. To ensure that different sources of media and information are used effectively for critical civic engagement and sustainable development.
2. To empower every citizen to access new information and knowledge and participate in content creation.
3. To question the neutrality of information/knowledge and to enlighten citizens that messages are not value neutral.
4. To ensure that every citizen has a right to engage in the process of knowledge generation and to express his/her opinion freely in a safe environment.
5. To ensure that citizens use their knowledge and skills to affect their attitude and behavior such that change is experienced as a dynamic process that involves production, evaluation and use of media and information technologies at every stage in life.

Teaching CML is a democratic process; it involves the efforts of staff and students together to critically examine an artifact. Len Masterman (1994) declared that the goal for media

PRO PAPER

education should be critical autonomy, so that students will want to critically question media when they are not with their teacher.

Mendoza (2016) states that, in regard to students conducting an analysis, most leaders in the digital and media literacy community use some version of these five key questions:

1. Who created this message?

This helps students recognize that all media is constructed by an author with a vision, background, and agenda. This aids students in questioning the textbooks, apps, and platforms they use.

2. Which techniques are used to attract my attention?

This question aids students in understanding what different forms of digital media use unique conventions to keep us engaged, i.e. videos, commercials, or apps.

3. How might different people interpret this message?

Students will ask themselves, how a specific message might mean to other groups of people.

4. Which lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented or missing?

Oftentimes certain perspectives and voices are missing, specifically women and minorities. It is important to understand what voices are missing and why.

5. Why is this message being sent?

In this question, students explore the motives behind sending a message, whether to gain power, profit, or influence.

Ideographic Criticism

Hall (1996) claims, “ideology refers to mental frameworks, such as concepts, languages, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation, which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, figure out, define, and render intelligible the way the society works,” (pg.29). In defining what is “normal” or accepted in a society, ideologies and ideological engage with power. Ideological criticism, in turn asks, which groups of people have the ‘power’ to define what is the norm. In addition, the act of ideological analysis “unmasks the mechanism by which ideological apparatuses such as the mass media turn certain values that privilege some and repress others into iron rules. Ideographic criticism is concerned with revealing these systems of power, because by comprehending its operation, we might be able to oppose its effects.” (Davidson, p. 5). In this project I will help students explore the Wonder Woman realm, asking where and when do we see the character adhering to American norms? Which characters in the film have the most ‘power’?

In addition, an ideological analysis aims to understand “how a cultural text specifically embodies and enacts a particular range of values, beliefs, and ideas” (White, 1992, p. 122) One often visited site for ideological analyses is media texts, wherein scholars examine “what messages these images send about the nature of the world, how it operates, and how it should be” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2014, p. 153). Research on media focuses on where, and how, beliefs are portrayed. In so doing, media analyses can make visible “how ideas are constructed, how they change over time, and when they are being challenged” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2014, p. 155).

Feminist Theory

In a patriarchal social order, masculinity is associated with superiority: whereas femininity linked with inferiority, and while masculinity implies strength, action, self-assertion and domination, femininity implies weakness, passivity, docility, obedience and self-negation (Schippers, 2007). Most superhero tales, in a patriarchal society, always focus on the fears and wishes of the male protagonist.

Radway (1984) explains that in romantic novels, American women “identify with a heroine who receives all the attention and care of an extraordinary man” (p. 65). This characterization may hold true, not only for women in a particular kind of novel, but also for women on TV and in film, for no matter how strong a heroine may be, the underlying myth often is that she still needs a man to save and protect her at critical times. From the perspective of feminist critics, a heroine in romance literature is only “superficially independent,” and she is indeed “deeply dependent and incapable of action herself” (Radway, 1984, p. 58). It is important to critically examine the relationships that exist in *Wonder Woman*, and how the relationships between Diana and her male counterparts act. Do they highlight her independence or is the character dependent on her male romantic interest? In what instances does *Wonder Woman* act autonomously, and what does this do for her as a feminist icon?

Furthermore, in communication, feminist theory describes, explains, and analyzes gender, communication, and social change (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004). Early gender studies focused on biological sex and how it manifests itself as physical, bodily, characteristics. In contrast, social

PRO PAPER

gender identity is thought to be learned through socialization, which modifies biological sex into standardized human behavior. Gender must be communicated to be known. In *Beyond the Velvet Ghetto*, Rakow (1989) writes, “Gender is not something we are but something we do and believe” (p. 289). In feminist criticism, researchers view gender to be a result of a continuous process of doings and repetitions – there is no ‘being’ behind doing (Butler 1990). Gender as a performance is imperative to examine when looking at media and, more specifically, film. From this, we can see how Wonder Woman’s gender is portrayed on film. How and when does Diana adhere to her gender roles and when and how does she challenge these norms and how do viewers perceive these acts?

Gender and Media

Research has shown that media, language, and gender discourse are interlinked. Gender refers to socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. As a construction, gender is established through repeated, performed, behaviors that are reinforced over time (Butler, 1988). Gender roles are considered “patterns of behavior, attitudes and personality attributes that are traditionally considered in a particular manner to be feminine or masculine.” (Alters & Schiff, 2009, p. 143).

Researchers in the past have utilized Goffman's (1976) conceptual framework, from *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* – which categorizes females as precious or fragile, passive, submissive, and in need of the protection or goodwill of others, for studying gender role portrayals (Belknap & Leonard, 1991; Kang, 1997; Smith, 1996). Even contemporary studies have found that traditional gender roles continue to dictate portrayals of women and men in the media, with male characters being dominant (Paek et al., 2011).

PRO PAPER

In terms of gender and superheroes, Becker and Eagly (2004) explain that there are three important factors that define heroism: risk-taking, concern for others, and voluntary motivation to act. Their research has shown that these factors apply in different ways when media is depicting a male superhero versus a female superhero. Scholars have stated that male heroes are expected to have risk-taking ability (Becker & Eagly, 2004; David & Brannon, 1976; Levant & Kopecky, 1995; Thompson & Pleck, 1986), and female heroines are more engaged in concern for others (Chodorow, 1978; Miller, 1976; Spence & Helmreich, 1978).

Media has the power to both expose and reinforce sexist discourse (Mills, 2008) Media, including popular movies and film, can hold popular appeal and serve as a source of enjoyment. It's entertainment, and media plays a significant role in shaping popular discourse and influencing public opinion. Presentations of women have the potential to both challenge the existing stereotypes and to reinforce preconceived ideas of gender and femininity. Therefore, programs that present representations of women must be unpacked, not accepted for blind consumption (Spigel, 2004).

The Male Gaze in Media

In feminist theory, the male gaze is the act of depicting the world and women in the visual arts and literature from a masculine and heterosexual point of view, presenting women as objects of male pleasure. Mulvey's (1975) theory of the male gaze has been a primary resource for understanding how hegemonic masculinity is coded in Hollywood films. Mulvey theorized that mainstream cinema features a masculine gaze that invites viewers to identify with male

PRO PAPER

protagonists and to marginalize and objectify women. Even today, it is hard for Hollywood to escape the male gaze.

Furthermore, there are few and far-between films and television shows that have a female protagonist that subvert the male gaze. Even films and series that have been celebrated for their feminist sensibilities, such as *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, both fall victim to the male gaze (Magoulick, 2006). In contrast, the more recent film, *The Hunger Games* has been successful in challenging the male gaze (Keller & Gibson, 2014). The film refigures the dominant male gaze of Hollywood cinema to focus on the power and agency of the female protagonist, to legitimate a female vantage point, and to encourage a questioning of patriarchal power (Keller 2014). Research on *Wonder Woman* can reveal how, and in what ways, the film challenges, or succumbs to, the male gaze.

Intersectionality and Race in Media

Intersectionality refers to forms of intersecting oppressions, which is inclusive of intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation, that work together in producing injustice (Collins, 2009, p. 21). Oftentimes, these intersecting oppressions reveals themselves in media and film. For example, multiple studies have concluded that whites are portrayed more frequently and positively than racial minority groups (Götz & Lemish, 2012).

In regard to media, it is also important to recognize the quantity of roles occupied by under-represented characters as it is to observe the quality of those roles. Racial minorities often appear in one-dimensional character roles and are not given as many speaking or leadership roles as their white counterparts (Klein & Shiffman, 2006). Female characters are also more likely to

PRO PAPER

be part of a team rather than the leader of the team (Götz & Lemish, 2012). Therefore, what roles do we see portrayed in *Wonder Woman*, and what are the qualities of those roles? Do they provide power and dimension to those roles that might be categorized as a dominant or subordinate?

Media may reflect stereotyped representations of different social and cultural categories and identities, perpetuating negative or obsolete conceptions of certain groups (Fürsich 2010; Rodrigo-Alsina 1999). These forms of stereotyping have been related to processes of oppression, subordination, disadvantage and discrimination, contributing to social inequality and systematic injustice (Saeed 2007; Chung 2007; Sidanius and Pratto 2001).

This project will address what intersections are most pivotal in the *Wonder Woman* film, and how they are manifested. How can these manifestations be compared in terms of the hegemonic and interpersonal domains of power?

Project Proposal

The Grünwald Declaration (1982) on ‘media education’ is a document that recognizes the impact of the media on society and spotlights the need for education systems to foster media competence. This document was followed by writings such as the Paris Agenda (2007) and the Braga Declaration (2011). These writings provide measures and recommendations to further media literacy. Furthermore, media influence is arguably stronger, leaving a longer lasting impression, when the members of the audience are young and of an impressionable age. In such a situation, family and school can play a crucial role in either promoting a healthy understanding of the world or encouraging discriminatory citizenship practices (Hively and Eveland 2009;

PRO PAPER

Kononova et al. 2011). Media is prevalent in everyday American life, therefore it is crucial to teach discernment, and arguably more important to teach media literacy to high school aged individuals, because they are more susceptible and impressionable to the messages they receive from the media.

Even more concerning is the research on how students may sometimes act as passive recipients of knowledge and let media narratives influence them. Instead of thinking critically of what they are viewing, they accept and internalize whatever is being presented to them in the media (Kellner & Share, 2006). In addition, if media representations reinforce their world-view, they begin to regard media as a container of truth. In other cases, when their community and its members are misrepresented in the media, it creates a sense of resentment towards the channels of mass communication, other religious communities and the establishment (Apple 2001). By creating a curriculum that focuses on dissecting media representations, we can hopefully challenge the students' views on media and how it is influencing their lives, creating more agency.

Media platforms can be, and have been, utilized to activate the agency in audience and encourage them to actively participate in the process of meaning-making. This is more likely to happen when audiences are equipped with the necessary skills to traverse media environments, critically evaluate their potential in bringing about a change in the world and invest their efforts in creating alternate narratives that challenge the dominant discourse. CML can be a tool to equip audiences.

PRO PAPER

This project will use CML as a framework to teach about race, class, ethnicity, and gender in the media. The curriculum developed will be five – 50 minutes sessions that can be taught over the course of roughly two weeks. The lesson plan is geared towards high school students, grades 9 -12.

The objectives of the curriculum, after the students have finished all the sessions, as is follows. Students will:

1. discuss characteristics of various stereotypes in our society.
2. develop an understanding of the impact of stereotypes in film and print media, in particular cartoons and comic strips.
3. develop the insights necessary to evaluate critically the messages disseminated by the mass media.
4. practice applying a formal strategy for analyzing, critiquing, and rethinking media that combines visual and textual elements (in particular film and comics).

The curriculum will involve comic strips, video clips, and comic and movie posters as a visual aid. Students will be asked to dissect and examine the representations of race, class, ethnicity and gender in the accompanied visual aids.

In general, students will participate in guided class discussions, group work, work sheets, and homework assignments that challenge the students to think critically about how the media portrays race, class, ethnicity and gender.

PRO PAPER

To assess what the students have learned, at the end of the course the students will be asked to write a short essay on their findings and to reflect on what they have learned about CML and stereotyping of race, class, ethnicity and gender in the media.

Case Study

Wonder Woman serves as an ideal case study due to her longevity in the media, and her more recent explosion in popularity. Popular culture has long been understood “as a cultural practice that has its own power to create social change” (Dolby 2003, p. 258), and such texts provide consumers with points of recognition, and ways for readers to understand their own lives as well as the lives of others. Popular culture is perceived to be a useful tool for classes that engage with notions of social justice and diversity (Harris 2013). *Wonder Woman* is a well-known icon, and likely, most high school aged children will know, or at least know-of her, making an easy pathway to identify and rationalize with the students. Using a popular icon like *Wonder Woman* can also make the curriculum more engaging and exciting for the students.

For the project, *Wonder Woman*, both the comics and the 2017 film, will be used as a case study for the entire curriculum. Several comic panels and comic book covers from the *Wonder Woman* comic series will be used to provide examples of stereotypes of race, class, ethnicity and gender. The panels selected will be representative of different eras in American history. The project will also utilize short video clips, screen shots, and movie posters from the 2017 *Wonder Woman* film.

References

- Abirafeh, L. (2017, June 23). Wonder Woman: Feminist Icon or Symbol of Oppression? [Web log post]. Retrieved October 08, 2017, from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/wonder-woman-feminist-icon-or-symbol-of-oppression_us_594d30bbe4b0f078efd980e3
- Alters, S., & Schiff, W. (2009). *Essential concepts for healthy living*. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.
- Apple, Michael (2001), *Educating the 'Right' Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*, London: Routledge.
- Aqsa, I. S (2015). A Feminist Representation in Pakistani Cinema: A Case Study of "Bol" The Movie. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 2224-3275.
- Ayres, J. (2016, February 20). When Were Superheroes Grim and Gritty? Retrieved April 09, 2018, from <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/when-were-superheroes-grim-and-gritty/#!>.
- Bandura, Albert (2001), "Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication," *Media Psychology*, 3, 265-299.
- Bhatia, K. V., & Pathak-Shelat, M. (2017). Media literacy as a pathway to religious literacy in pluralistic democracies: Designing a critical media education pedagogy for primary school children in India. *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, 8(2), 189-209. doi:10.1386/iscc.8.2-3.189_1.
- The Broadcast Film Critics Association. (2018, January 11). *Winners Announced For The 23rd Annual Critics' Choice Awards* [Press release]. Retrieved February 16, 2017, from www.criticschoice.com/2018/01/winners-announced-23rd-annual-critics-choice-awards/.
- Bunn, Geoffrey C. (1997). *The lie detector, Wonder Woman and liberty: the life and work of William Moulton Marston*. History of the Human Sciences. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications. **10** (1): 91–119.
- Butler, Judith. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519–531. doi: 10.2307/3207893.
- Butler, Judith (1990). *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Cauterucci, C. (2017, June 02). I Wish Wonder Woman Were as Feminist as It Thinks It Is. Retrieved December 02, 2017, from http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2017/06/02/i_wish_wonder_woman_were_as_feminist_as_it_thinks_it_is.html.

PRO PAPER

- Chapman, Martina (2016), Mapping of Media Literacy Practices and Actions in EU-28, *Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory*.
- Choi, Y., Starr, W. J., Kim, K., & Parish, N. (2014). Who is wonder woman? gender stereotypes and heroism in television commercials. *Media Report to Women*, 42(1), 12-18. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.weblib.lib.umt.edu:2443/docview/1517918434?accountid=14593>.
- Christine Scodari (2012) “Nyota Uhura is Not a White Girl”, *Feminist Media Studies*, 12:3, 335-351, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2011.615605.
- Chung, S. K. (2007), ‘Media literacy art education: Deconstructing lesbian and gay stereotypes in the media’, *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 26:1, pp. 98–107.
- Collins, Patricia Hill (2009) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Routledge Classics, New York.
- Craft, S., Maksl, A., & Ashley, S. (2013). Measuring news media literacy: How knowledge and motivations combine to create news-literate teens. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10355/34713>.
- Croteau, D., & Hoynes, W. (2014). *Media/society: industries, images, and audiences*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Davidson, R. (2004). Reconciling framing and ideological analysis: An exploratory study of business news. Conference Papers—*International Communication Association*, p. 1.
- Decker, J. (2004). *Ideology*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dockterman, E. (2016, December 19). Wonder Woman Breaks Through. *Time Magazine*.
- Dow, B.J. (1996). *Prime time feminism: Television, media culture, and the women’s movement since 1970*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Dow, B. J. (2016). Authority, invention, and context in feminist rhetorical criticism. *Review Of Communication*, 16(1), 60-76. doi:10.1080/15358593.2016.1183878.
- Figueras-Maz, M., Masanet, M., & Ferrés, J. (2017). Mobile devices in higher education: A pending issue in multidimensional media literacy. *Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies*, 9(1), 135-144. doi:10.1386/cjcs.9.1.135_1.
- Funk, Steven, Kellner, Douglas and Share, Jeff (2016), ‘Critical media literacy as transformative pedagogy’, in Y. Melda and K. Jared (eds), *Handbook of Research on Media Literacy in the Digital Age*, Hershey, PA: IGI Global, pp. 1–30.
- Fürsich, E. (2010), ‘Media and the representation of Others’, *International Social Science Journal*, 61:199, pp. 113–30.

PRO PAPER

- Götz, M., & Lemish, D. (2012). *Sexy girls, heroes and funny losers: Gender representations in children's TV around the world*. (M. Götz and D. Lemish Eds.). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 10.3726/978-3-631-63319-9.
- Hall, Stuart. (1996). The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees. In Kuan-Hsing Chen & David Morley (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies* (pp. 244-5). London: Routledge.
- Harris, K. L. (2015). Feminist Dilemmatic Theorizing: New Materialism in Communication Studies. *Communication Theory*, 26(2), 150-170. doi:10.1111/comt.12083.
- Hawksley, R. (2014, October 16). Wonder Woman to be first female-led superhero film since 2005. Retrieved December 14, 2017, from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/film-news/11166315/Wonder-Woman-to-be-first-female-led-superhero-film-since-2005.html>.
- Heinberg, A., Snyder, Z., & Fuchs, J. (2017, October 15). Wonder Woman. Retrieved October 26, 2017, from https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/wonder_woman_2017/.
- Hively, Myiah and Eveland, William (2009), 'Contextual antecedents and political consequences of adolescent political discussion, discussion elaboration, and network diversity', *Political Communication*, 26:1, pp. 30-47.
- Hornaday, A. (2017, May 31). Review | 'Wonder Woman' saves the day, in more ways than one. Retrieved December 01, 2017, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/movies/wonder-woman-saves-the-day-in-more-ways-than-one/2017/05/31/c20193c6-45ea-11e7-98cd-af64b4fe2dfc_story.html?tid=kp_google&utm_term=.03337ffb083b.
- Hughes, M. (2017, November 02). 'Wonder Woman' Is Officially The Highest-Grossing Superhero Origin Film. Retrieved December 01, 2017, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markhughes/2017/11/02/wonder-woman-is-officially-the-highest-grossing-superhero-origin-film/#78106c27ebd9>.
- Jenkins, P. (Director). (2017). *Wonder Woman* [Motion picture on DVD]. USA: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Kahne, J., Lee, N., & Feezell, J. T. (2012). Digital media literacy education and online civic and political participation. *International Journal of Communication*, 6, 1-24.
- Keller, A., & Gibson, K. L. (2014). Appropriating the Male Gaze in The Hunger Games: The Rhetoric of a Resistant Female Vantage Point. *Texas Speech Communication Journal*, 38(1), 21-30.
- Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2006). Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 26(3), 369-386. doi:10.1080/01596300500200169.
- Kilkenny, K. (2015). The Social Justice League. *Pacific Standard*, 8(6), 70-71.

PRO PAPER

- Klein, H., & Shiffman, K. (2006). Race-related content of animated cartoons. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 17, 163–182.10.1080/10646170600829493.
- Kononova, Anastasia, Alhabash, Saleem and Cropp, Fritz (2011), ‘The role of media in the process of socialization to American politics among international students’, *The International Communication Gazette*, 73:4, pp. 302–21.
- Kyra Hunting, Adriane Grumbein & Maria Cahill (2017) Watch and Learn: Gendered Discrepancies in Educational Messages on Television Channels Targeted at Boys versus Girls, *Mass Communication and Society*, 21:1, 115-141, DOI: 10.1080/15205436.2017.1370114.
- Kvaran, K. M. (2017), Super Daddy Issues: Parental Figures, Masculinity, and Superhero Films. *J Pop Cult*, 50: 218-238. doi:10.1111/jpcu.12531.
- Lepore, J. (2015). *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*. Melbourne: Scribe.
- Magoulick, M. (2006). Frustrating Female Heroism: Mixed Messages in Xena, Nikita, and Buffy. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 39(5), 729-755. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5931.2006.00326.x
- Masterman, L. (1994). A rationale for media education (First Part). In L. Masterman & F. Mariet (Eds.), *Media education in 1990s' Europe* (pp. 5–87). Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- McClintock, P. (2017, June 04). Box Office: 'Wonder Woman' Opens to Historic \$103M. Retrieved December 09, 2017, from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/box-office-wonder-woman-opens-historic-1005m-1010026>.
- McClintock, P. (2017, November 13). 'Wonder Woman 2' Release Date Moved Up 6 Weeks. Retrieved April 10, 2018, from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/wonder-woman-2-release-date-moves-up-6-weeks-1057572>.
- Media Literacy Defined. (2017, March 10). Retrieved April 10, 2018, from <https://namle.net/publications/media-literacy-definitions/>.
- Mendoza, K. (2016, April 20). 5 Questions Students Should Ask About Media. Retrieved April 10, 2018, from <https://www.common sense.org/education/blog/5-questions-students-should-ask-about-media>
- Mihailidis, P. (2012). Introduction—News literacy in the dawn of a hyper media age. In P. Mihailidis (Ed.), *News literacy: Global perspectives for the newsroom and classroom* (pp. 1–17). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Miller, M. K., Rauch, J. A. & Kaplan, T. (2016) Gender Differences in Movie Superheroes' Roles, Appearances, and Violence. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, No. 10. doi:10.7264/N3HX19ZK

PRO PAPER

- Molek-Kozakowska, K. (2012). Multiple Ideologies in The Media Construction of Women in Politics: A Case Study of Gender Parity Debate in Poland. *Critical Approaches To Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines*, 5(2), 72-87.
- Pollitt, K. (2014, October 14). Wonder Woman's Kinky Feminist Roots. Retrieved April 05, 2018, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/11/wonder-womans-kinky-feminist-roots/380788/>.
- Radway, Janice. (1984). Interpretive communities and variable literacies: The functions of romance reading. *Daedalus*, 113(3), 49-73.
- Rakow, L. F., & Wackwitz, L. A. (2004). *Feminist communication theory: selections in context*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rakow, L.F. (1989) *From the feminization of Public Relations to the Promise of Feminization*. Paper presented at the meeting of the International Communication Association, San Francisco.
- Rodrigo-Alsina, M. (1999), *La comunicación intercultural*, Barcelona: Anthropos.
- Saeed, A. (2007), 'Media, racism and Islamophobia: The representation of Islam and Muslims in the media', *Sociology Compass*, 1:2, pp. 443–62.
- Schippers, M. (2007). Recovering the feminine other: Masculinity, femininity, and gender hegemony. *Theory and Society*, 36(1), 85-102. doi:10.1007/s11186-007-9022-4.
- Sidanius, J. and Pratto, F. (2001), *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Storey, J. (1994). *Cultural theory and popular culture: An introduction*. Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- Studlar, G. (1984). Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema. *Quarterly Review of Film & Video*, 9(4), 267-282.
- UNESCO (2016), 'Media and information literacy', UNESCO Communication and Information, 10 April, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communicationand-information/media-development/media-literacy/mil-as-compositeconcept>.
- Wertham, Fredric (1954). *Seduction of the Innocent*. Rinehart & Company. pp. 192, 234–235.
- Westfahl, G. (2005). *The Greenwood encyclopedia of science fiction and fantasy: Themes, works, and wonders*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- White, M. (1992). Ideological analysis and television. In R. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of discourse reassembled* (pp. 121–151). Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Wonder Woman. (2018, April 07). Retrieved April 07, 2018, from <https://www.dccomics.com/characters/wonder-woman>

PRO PAPER

Wonder Woman #1 (Summer 1942). (n.d.). Retrieved April 09, 2018, from <https://www.comics.org/issue/2268/>.

Yousaf, Z., Adnan, M., & Aksar, I. A. (2017). Challenges of Patriarchal Ideologies in Pakistani Cinema: A Case of Feminist Depiction in Films. *Global Media Journal: Pakistan Edition*, 10(1), 87-107.

[Date for Class]

Instructor

Email

Office Location & Hours

[]

Understanding what you are seeing and hearing from the media is important for seeing the kinds of affects it might have on its audience. It important for combating stereotypes and other misconceptions of race, gender, ethnicity, and class. This class will examine how we can use Wonder Woman to learn how media impacts us.

- discuss characteristics of various stereotypes in our society.
- develop an understanding of the impact of stereotypes in film and print media, cartoons, and comic strips.
- develop the insights necessary to evaluate critically the messages disseminated by the mass media.
- practice applying a formal strategy for analyzing, critiquing, and rethinking media that combines visual and textual elements (in particular film and comics).

- comic strips spanning several weeks/months (depending on the circulation of the comic)

PRO PAPER

Course Schedule

Session	Topic	Reading	Exercises
Session 1	Introduction	N/A	In class-discussion
Session 2	Gender	PBS -Intro to gender stereotyping	Analyze Wonder Woman comics
Session 3	The Male Gaze	N/A	Watch movie clip of Wonder Woman
Session 4	Race/Ethnicity, and Class	The Double Standard in How The Media Is Portraying The Las Vegas Shooter	Watch movie clip of Wonder Woman
Session 5	Review and Conclusion	N/A	Discuss essays

Assignments

Date	Subject
Session 5	Comic makeover and short essay due

OUTLINE - Pro paper Project**1. Session One – Introduction**

- a. What is Critical Media Literacy
 - i. How we approach it.
- b. Wonder Woman
 - i. Background
 - ii. Overview of artifacts
- c. Go over syllabus for the class

2. Session Two – Gender

- a. Lecture: What is gender?
 - i. Definition and terms to know
 - ii. How does it function in media?
 - iii. Stereotyping
- b. Work sheet - Comic panels, movie posters
- c. Discussion: Gender in Wonder Woman
 - i. How is gender portrayed in Wonder Woman?
 - ii. Stereotypes? Resisting gender norms?
- d. Conclusion

3. Session Three – The Male Gaze

- a. What is the Male Gaze?
 - i. Definition
 - ii. Effects of the Male Gaze
 - iii. Guided discussion on Male gaze
- b. Show Clips from Wonder Woman
- c. Work sheet
- d. Ending discussion

4. Session Four – Race/Ethnicity and Class

- a. Lecture: Defining race/ethnicity, defining class and terms to know
- b. Lecture: Media and Race/ethnicity

PRO PAPER

- c. Lecture: stereotypes and their impacts
- d. Activity: bring in your own comic panels, worksheet
- e. Discussion
 - i. Where do we see portrayal of race/ ethnicity and class?
 - ii. How are they helpful or hurtful?
- f. Conclusion

5. Session Five – Review and Conclusion

- a. Lecture: Overview of media and gender, race, ethnicity, and class.
- b. Lecture: Critical Media Literacy – what have we learned?
- c. Activity: How would you rewrite Wonder Woman?
- d. Discussion: Students share their essays
- e. Conclusion
 - i. Using CML going forward

Session One – Introduction

1. Introduction

- i.** This is where you will introduce the curriculum. Give the class a general sense of what you will be teaching in the course and the goals and outcomes:
 - i.** The class will be learning about how media affects our views and beliefs, and what we consider to be ‘normal’ behaviors in society.
 - ii.** We will view different representations of gender, race/ethnicity, and social class, and stereotypes we often see depicted.
 - iii.** The class will use Wonder Woman to learn how to analyze media, and to learn about stereotyping of gender, race/ethnicity, and class.
- ii.** The goal of this class is for the students to be able to think critically about what they are consuming from the media, and how messages from the media can affect us.
- iii.** When the class is done, the students should have a good understanding of how media portrays gender, race/ethnicity, and class, and have a basic understanding of how those stereotypes help or hurt society.

2. Introduce these concepts and terms to the class:

- i. Critical Media Literacy (CML)** – is teaching the ability to understand how we access media – with an understanding of where it is sourced, analyze it – what are the messages we are receiving, evaluate it – what does the messages we receive from it do for us and what are the impacts of the message, and act – what are we doing in response to the message?
 - i.** To analyze a message there are five questions that a person should ask:
 - a.** Who created this message?
 - b.** How did I receive this message (i.e. app, commercial, video), and why did it grab my attention?
 - c.** How might other people, from different cultures, countries, racial groups, feel about this message?
 - d.** What lifestyles, values, points of views do we see in this message? Who is left out?

PRO PAPER

- e. Why is this message being sent?
- ii. **Media** – the ways in which we receive mass communication. For example: Internet, television, movies, radio.
- iii. **Ideology** – what a society considers to be their values and beliefs. It is what a group of people consider to be ‘normal’ and acceptable.
 - i. It is important to explain here to the class that ideology is important to know, because certain groups in a society hold the power to determine what these rules and norms are (i.e. not everyone gets to decide, and some voices are underrepresented, especially when it comes to media).

** Now would be a good time to give the students the glossary sheet handout (Aujla & Bhanot, 2016).

** Note: You will introduce more terms as you progress, it is important to only introduce a few at a time as to not overload the students, especially since these terms will most likely be new to them and are advanced concepts.

3. Wonder Woman

- i. Here you will go over the background of the iconic Wonder Woman:
 - i. Background:
 1. Wonder Woman first appeared in in October 1941.
 2. Wonder Woman was created by William Moulton Marston, an American psychologist and writer -he wrote under the name of Charles Moulton.
 3. Marston was married to Elizabeth Holloway Marston, and also had a polyamorous life partner, Olive Byrne. The author drew much of his inspirations of Wonder Woman from them, and the women played a large part in influenced Wonder Woman's creation.
 4. Marston was a feminist and supporter of the women’s suffrage movement. Suffrage was a social movement for the right of women to vote and run for office; it was a part of the overall

women's rights movement. Many of the themes in the comics come from his passion for women's rights.

5. Marston was into BDSM (bondage) which is where he drew inspiration for his comics – he often depicted Wonder Woman tied up.
6. Wonder Woman has appeared in 6,227 comics. Wonder Woman comic are still in print today, which makes a total of 77 years that the series had been around.

ii. Who is Wonder Woman?

1. Wonder Woman is a fictional super-heroine.
2. Her original storyline is based in World War II (WWII), so she is very patriotic; we can see this by her outfit, and she is often depicted fighting Nazis.
3. There is heavy influence from Greek mythology – She is the daughter of Zeus and Queen Hippolyta, sculpted from clay. She lives on a mythical island with the other Amazonia woman warriors.
4. Wonder Woman stands for love, justice, and kindness.
5. She carries around a sword, shield, and a lasso of truth – which makes whoever is bound by it reveal the truth.

ii. Go over the Wonder Woman materials you will be using for the class

i. Comics and comic book covers

1. Let the students know they will be viewing several different comic panels and several comic book covers from different eras through time. It is important to look at the series at different times in history, because they are reflective of the ideology of that time.

ii. Movie and movie posters

1. The students will also view several clips from the 2017 Wonder Woman film.

PRO PAPER

2. Several of the Wonder Woman movie posters will be analyzed.

These are important for the class to look at because they showcase the differences in how female and male superheroes are portrayed.

4. Syllabus and Wrap up

- i. Briefly go over what you will be doing in the following class sessions. Include materials they will need, and what the assignments will entail.
- ii. Assign reading: PBS Newshour article *Well-behaved women seldom make history – Introduction to stereotypes*.
<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/app/uploads/2014/02/Introduction-to-Gender-Stereotyping.pdf>
- iii. Now is the time to allow the students to ask any questions.

Session Two – Gender and Media

1. Introduction and Overview of session

- a. Remind the students that they should have read the PBS Newshour article *Well-behaved women seldom make history – Introduction to stereotypes*.
- b. Go over syllabus for the day.

2. Lecture: What is Gender?

- a. Give the following definition to the students:
 - i. **Gender** was once considered to be contingent on biological, physical, characteristics, but today more researchers view gender as a socially constructed.
 - ii. **Gender** is the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. As a construction, gender is established through repeated, performed, behaviors that are reinforced over time (Butler, 1988). Gender roles are considered “patterns of behavior, attitudes and personality attributes that are traditionally considered in a particular manner to be feminine or masculine.” (Alters & Schiff, 2009, p. 143).

** Note: this would be a good time to cover some of the other terms that are on the glossary hand-out.

- b. How we see gender in the media
 - i. Depictions of gender in the media is important – we often learn from what we view in the media, and often we take them as normal. So what we see on T.V. has the power to shape how women and men ‘should’ act.
 - ii. Recent studies have found that traditional gender roles continue to dictate portrayals of women and men in the media, with male characters being dominant.
 - iii. Often in the media, a woman’s main goal is love, whilst men are often shown as the strong, dominant one, who relies solely on himself.

PRO PAPER

- iv. For women on TV and in film, for no matter how strong a heroine may be, the underlying myth often is that she still needs a man to save and protect her at critical times.

3. Stereotypes of gender

- i. Go over the assigned reading PBS Newshour article *Well-behaved women seldom make history – Introduction to stereotypes*.
- ii. Open the floor to discussion and clarify any questions the students might have about the reading.

4. Worksheet

- a. Have the students view the *Wonder Woman* comic panels on their own for five minutes, ask them to fill out the handout and write down what they notice.
- b. Have the students get into groups and discuss what they wrote down. This should be about 10 minutes.

5. Discussion: Gender in Wonder Woman

- a. Ask the students these questions:
 - i. What did you notice about the comics?
 - ii. How do these comics fight stereotypes? How do they support stereotypes?
 - iii. What is important about these comics in relation to the time period they were printed?
 - iv. What is the message the author is conveying? Why is it important?
 - v. At the time these comics came out, how do you think the public reacted to them? How do you think people react to them today?
 - vi. What does this do for the public? Good or bad?

6. Conclusion

- a. Prompt the students to ask any questions they might have.
- b. Go over the syllabus again, remind the students of the assignments.

Session Three – The Male Gaze

1. Lecture: What is the Male Gaze?

- a. Definition:** The male gaze is the act of depicting the world and women in the visual arts and literature from a masculine and heterosexual point of view, presenting women as objects of male pleasure.
 - i.** The male gaze has three perspectives:
 - 1.** The person behind the camera
 - 2.** The characters within the representation
 - 3.** And that of the spectator
- b. Effects of the male gaze**
 - i.** A masculine gaze invites viewers to identify with male protagonists and to marginalize and objectify women.
 - ii.** Even today, the male gaze can be seen in most media, which normalizes the objectification of women.
 - iii.** The male gaze denies women their human identity, reducing them to objects to be admired for physical appearance and male sexual desires and fantasies.
 - iv.** It is assumed that whatever a woman wears/does is all for the purpose of male attention.
 - v.** It alienates any man who isn't white and heterosexual.
 - vi.** For women who don't conform to 'normal', American, standards of beauty – like women of color - that type of dominance can destroy self-worth and diminish the ability to speak their mind.
- c. Signs of the male gaze:**
 - i.** The camera will linger on a part of a woman's body much longer than needed.
 - ii.** Women in the movie are more passive participants, rather than having autonomy, or taking charge of the situation.
 - iii.** Women in the film are only valued for their good looks, and often have no depth of character, or any real 'back story'.

- iv. Women in the film are always ‘available’ to, and show interest in, the men.

2. Guided discussion on Male gaze

- a. Ask these questions to your class:
 - i. How can we be more aware of the male gaze?
 - 1. Response: pay attention to how women are portrayed in the media. Think about what we consider ‘normal’. Are there any non-traditionally beautiful women in the media? If so, think about how they are portrayed, and if it is fair.
 - ii. What can we say to others to bring attention to the male gaze?
 - 1. Response: Just talking about it is helpful. Sometimes giving a voice to someone who feels like they don’t conform to traditional beauty standards can give them power to challenge these norms.
 - iii. What are some things, maybe even some daily things, we can do to combat the male gaze?
 - 1. Response: Stand up for women when they are being objectified. Its important to make sure women have autonomy over their body, their voice, and their actions.

3. Activity: Show Clip from Wonder Woman

- a. Ask the student to take notes on what they observe during this movie clip.
- b. A good section of the film to show would be from minute 46:00 to about 58:00
 - i. Background:
 - 1. In this part of the movie, Diana arrives in London with Captain Steve Trevor. Even though Diana is supposedly very well-read, she knows hundreds of languages as an example of her brilliance, she is still guided by the Steve through the city, and we see how she adjusts to life away from her home island of Themyscira. We are also introduced to Etta Candy, Steve’s assistant, and how she is portrayed – she mentions the women’s suffrage movement. We also see Diana in action, fighting off several bad guys while protecting Steve Trevor. Overall, in this clip, we see how Diana is

portrayed whilst being in the city, among men, and how her actions and opinions are supported and challenged.

4. Work sheet

- a. Have the students break into groups and discuss what they noticed about the film clip. This should be about 5-10 minutes.

5. Ending discussion/ Conclusion

- a. Have the students share what they wrote down and/or discussed in their group.
- b. Ask the students these questions:
 - i. What did you notice about the way Diana was treated, especially by her male counterparts? How is this good or bad?
 - ii. What did you think of Etta Candy? Is her portrayal fair? Are there any stereotypes that we see? What are some positive and negative things about her character?
 - iii. Are there any instances of the male gaze? Give examples.
 - iv. How would you change these scenes to rid them of the male gaze, unfair gender portrayals and stereotypes?
- c. Go over their comic make over assignment. Remind the students that this assignment is due for session five.
- d. Give the students the comic character makeover rubric. *This will be used as a scoring sheet; have the students use it to guide their assignment.*
- e. Give an overview of the next session.
- f. Open the floor to any final questions.
- g. Remind the students to read The Huffington Post article *The Double Standard In How The Media Is Portraying The Las Vegas Shooter*
https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/double-standard-white-privilege-media-las-vegas-shooting_us_59d3da15e4b04b9f92058316

Session Four - Race/Ethnicity, Class, and Religion

1. Go over the Huffington Post article
 - a. Give a brief summary of the article to the student and ask them if they have any questions about the article, or if they need any clarification.
2. **Lecture:** Defining race/ethnicity and terms to know.
 - a. **Race/Ethnicity:** Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines race as each of the major divisions of humankind, having distinct physical characteristics (i.e. Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic). Ethnicity refers to a group of people sharing the same culture, history, language, etc.
 - b. **Intersectionality** is the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.
 - i. This means that a person can be, and often is, discriminated on for several reasons, like a person that is female and black. These compounding oppressions cannot be separated.
 - ii. In media and film, we can see intersecting oppressions. For example, multiple studies have concluded that whites are portrayed more frequently and positively than racial minority groups. (Tukachinsky et al., 2017)
 - iii. The quantity and quality of roles occupied by under-represented characters is also important to observe. Racial minorities often appear in one-dimensional character roles and are not given as many speaking or leadership roles as their white counterparts.
 - c. **Class:** Merriam-Webster defines social class as group sharing the same economic or social status.
 - i. The United States has six social classes: Upper class, New money, Middle class, Working class, Working poor, and Poverty. Sometimes its referred to as the Upper Class, Middle Class, and the Lower Class.
 - ii. Race and other large-scale groupings can also influence class standing. The association of particular ethnic groups with class statuses is common in many societies. In general, we see minorities associated with lower

PRO PAPER

class standings while the upper-class rankings are usually associated with Caucasians.

- iii. Representation of social class have long been portrayed in the media and film. Often, there are many assumptions made about a person depending on their social class. For example, Upper class people seem uptight and the poor seem lazy and uneducated. These stereotypes are often untrue and hurtful.
- d. **Religion:** is a particular system of faith and worship (i.e. Christian, Muslim, Jewish).
 - i. In the media, we often see stereotypes of different religions. For example, a Muslim is seen as a terrorist, a Jewish person is seen as money hungry.
 - ii. The decision of how to shape a ‘story’ is driven by underlying cultural norms. America’s national trope is “Muslims are bad, and Christians are good”.

3. Activity

- a. Show clips from Wonder Woman
 - i. 1:03:00 to about 1:13:00
 - ii. In this section of the film, Diana meets the group that Captain Steve Trevor gathers to travel to the front lines of the war.
 - iii. Ask your students to write down their thoughts and observations while they watch this clip. They should pay special attention to how the different race/ethnicities are portrayed.

4. Discussion

- a. After you’ve watched the clip, ask the students these questions:
 - i. What are the different portrayals of race/ ethnicity and social class in this clip?
 - ii. How are they helpful or hurtful?
 - iii. What do you think of the portrayal of Sir Patrick? What would you say his social class is? How is he different than the other characters in this film?
 - iv. What do you think of the portrayal of Sameer? Is it fair? Where is it problematic?

PRO PAPER

- v. What do you think of the portrayal of Chief? Is it fair? Where is it problematic?
- vi. What do you think of Charlie? Is his portrayal fair?
- vii. Where do we see stereotypes? Where do we see stereotypes challenged?
- viii. What does this suggest about American's views on other races/ethnicities and social class?

5. Conclusion

- a. Go over the syllabus, remind the students that their comic makeover assignment is due next session.
- b. Open the floor to any questions the students might have.

Session Five – Review and Conclusion

- 1. Lecture:** Overview of media and gender, race/ethnicity, and class.
 - a. Quickly revisit the terms the students have learned in previous sessions, now would also be a good time to go over the glossary hand out again.
 - i. Clarify any remaining questions the students might have about these terms.
- 2. Activity:** How would you rewrite Wonder Woman?
 - a. Have the students gather in a group for about five minutes. Ask them to rewrite Wonder Woman in a way that would make the film more progressive.
 - b. Ask the groups to share their revisions of Wonder Woman.
- 3. Lecture:** Critical Media Literacy – what have we learned?
 - a. Go over the goals of CML:
 - i. Discuss characteristics of various stereotypes in our society.
 - ii. Develop an understanding of the impact of stereotypes in film and print media.
 - iii. Develop the insights necessary to evaluate critically the messages disseminated by the mass media.
 - iv. Practice applying a formal strategy for analyzing, critiquing, and rethinking media that combines visual and textual elements.
 - b. Ask the students these questions:
 - i. What have we learned about media and gender?
 - ii. What have we learned about media and race/ethnicity?
 - iii. What have we learned about media and social class?
 - iv. What have we learned about media and religion?
 - v. What is some stereotyping the media often portrays?
 - vi. What are some things we can do to combat stereotypes?
- 4. Discussion:** Students share their comic makeovers.
- 5. Conclusion**
 - a. Give the students some pointers on how to use CML in their future:

PRO PAPER

- i. Consider the question of why the message was sent and where it came from.
 - ii. Think critically of what we consider 'normal', and how 'normal' is portrayed in the media.
 - iii. Think critically of who is being represented in the media? Who is being excluded?
 - iv. Is the message I am receiving for a certain group of people? If so, who does it benefit? Who might be disadvantaged?
 - v. Are the portrayals of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and/or religion fair? What assumptions is the message making about these different intersections? Are they accurate? Do we see any stereotypes?
- b. Open the floor to any questions the students might have.

Comic Makeover

Name: _____

Date: _____

For this assignment, you will be examining images of men, women, and children in comic strips, evaluating gender, racial, ethnic, and class stereotypes, and providing improved alternatives to the existing representations.

1. Choose three characters from a comic of your choosing. Gather at least five different comic panels. Collect copies of the comics and turn in the comics with the rest of your project.
2. Summarize the storyline for each comic strip and record the issues of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and/or religion that you see in the comic.
3. Evaluate how fair, regarding, the comic's portrayal of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and/or religion, each comic strip is overall. Where do you stereotypes? Where are stereotypes challenged?
4. Perform a "comic character makeover" and rewrite the characters to make their portrayals fairer.
5. Along with your revised comic strip sketch write a short essay, about 200 words, answering this question: As you examined and revised your comic strip, what did you realize that you didn't notice before about its portrayals of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and/or religion?

Analyze the Comic

Quickly scan the comic. What do you notice first?

What is the title or caption?

Observe:

WORDS	VISUALS
Are there labels, descriptions, thoughts, or dialogue?	List the people, objects, and places in the cartoon.
	List the actions or activities.

Other comments:

WORDS PRO PAPER	VISUALS
Which words or phrases are the most significant?	Which of the visuals are symbols?
List adjectives that describe the emotions portrayed.	What do they stand for?

What was happening at the time in history it was created?

What is the message? What does this say about stereotypes, ideology of that time?

What did you learn from these comics?

What other documents or historical evidence are you going to use to help you understand this event or topic?

GLOSSARY

Gender is a social construct that refers to certain attitudes, thoughts and behaviors being associated with either the biological male or female sex.

Gender ideology refers to the expectation that individuals act according to the normative gender roles embedded in a given society.

Gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender. It advantages or disadvantages an individual based on their gender rather than relevant characteristics or attributes of the individual.

Social transgression refers to challenging the established societal standards of behavior and deliberately opposing what is normally accepted by society or what has been accepted in the past.

Objectification refers to the degrading of an individual by viewing them as an object rather than as a human. It involves a focus on an individual's physical attributes and a dismissal or ignorance towards other important attributes of the individual such as intelligence or personality.

Sexual objectification refers to the depicting of an individual as an object of desire rather than a human with thoughts and desires of their own. This involves viewing or speaking of an individual as only their bodies or of fetishized parts of their bodies.

Subject is a philosophical term that refers to a being that observes whereas the object is the thing observed.

The gaze refers to the objectification and disempowerment of an individual by classifying and expecting specific behaviors that are appropriate for their classification. The gaze is the subjective perspective that frames the spectators' understanding of the object.

Male gaze is a term coined by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey that refers to the masculine point of view that is depicted in popular culture, visual arts and literature where women are objectified. The male gaze depicts women as objects of desire to be used for male pleasure and suggests to women that this is how they are perceived and therefore how they should behave.

Orientalism is a concept developed by cultural critic Edward Said that refers to an inaccurate Western interpretation of Asia that relies on stereotypes and false representations of its culture. It often exaggerates, exoticizes and distorts Eastern culture to appear backwards, exotic and/or uncivilized.

The Other is the opposite of the self, us and the same. It refers to those who are on the periphery or margins of social and cultural norms.

Aujla, A., & Bhanot, N. (2016, October). *Returning the Gaze, teaching resource guide* [Scholarly project]. In *The Gaze*. Retrieved August 05, 2018, from [http://www.humbergalleries.ca/sites/default/files/Returning the Gaze Teaching Resource Guide.pdf](http://www.humbergalleries.ca/sites/default/files/Returning%20the%20Gaze%20Teaching%20Resource%20Guide.pdf)

PRO PAPER

Comic Handout

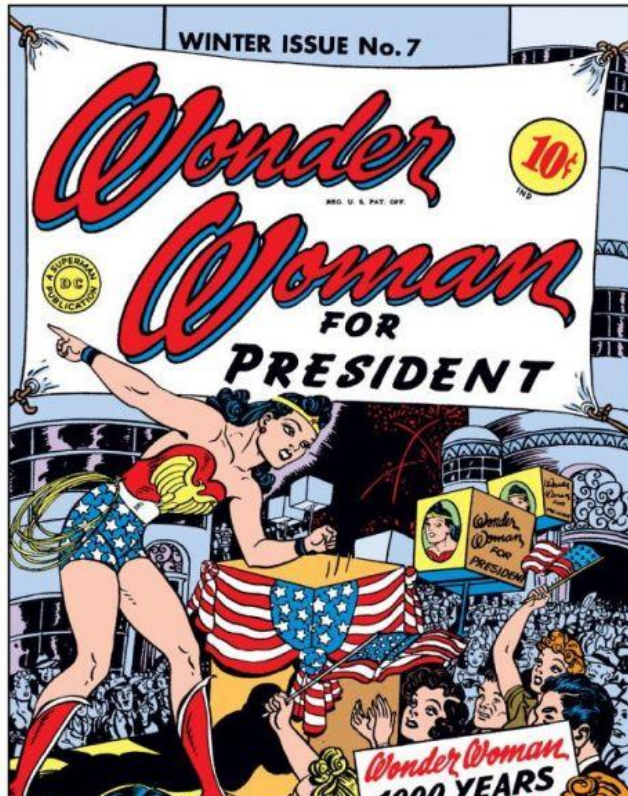


Figure 1 comic book cover (1943)



Figure 2 "The Grandee Caper", Wonder Woman #203 (1972)

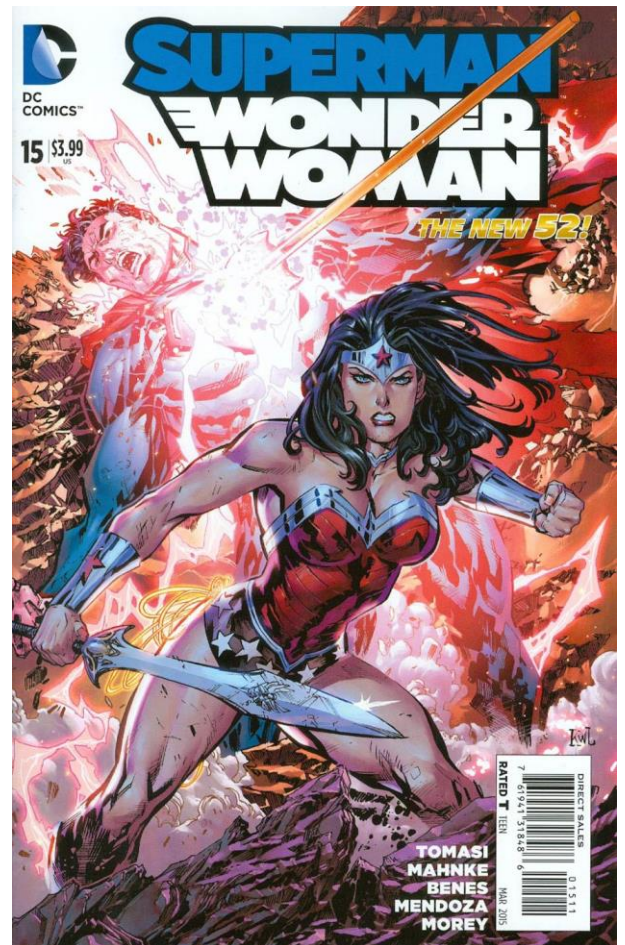


Figure 3 - Wonder Woman (2017)

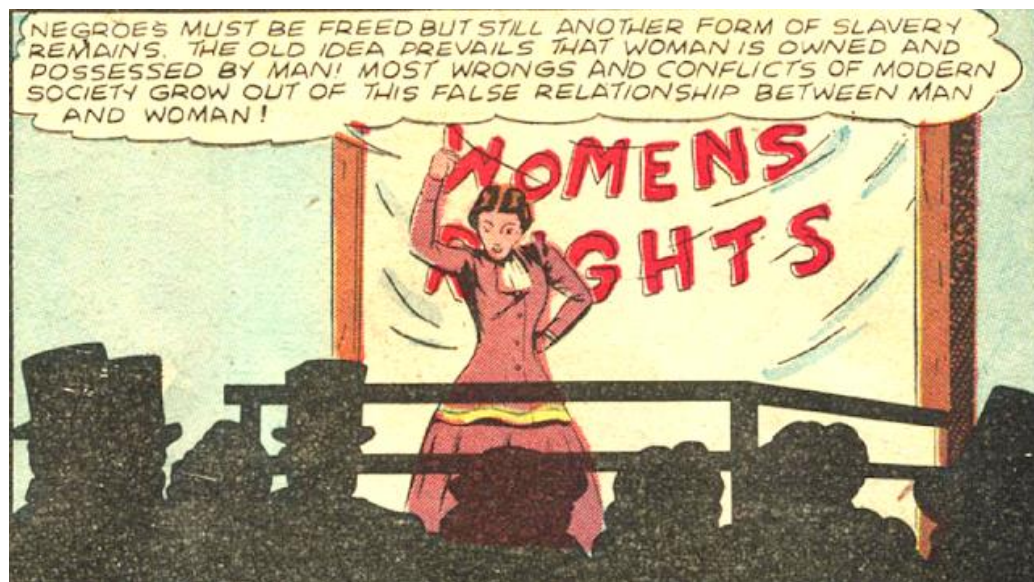


Figure 4- Susan B. Anthony "Wonder Woman of History" filler in Wonder Woman #5 (1943)



Figure 5 - Wonder Woman special 'Women's Lib' issue. (1972)



Figure 6 Wonder Woman (2016)